

## **Why Prepare for Disaster?**

Disaster can strike without warning, forcing you to go for days without basic necessities or to evacuate your home. Relief workers will be on the scene following a disaster, but may not be able to reach you immediately.

You need to be prepared. Knowing the steps to take during a disaster – whether flooding, tornadoes, earthquakes or another crisis – can greatly reduce the danger and distress your family may face. This guide will help you and your family plan for a variety of emergency situations, persevere during them and recover afterward. Contact your local emergency management office or American Red Cross chapter to learn which disasters could strike your community. Use their information, along with this guide, to help you prepare for and reduce the risks you face.

## **Creating a Basic Emergency Plan**

Having a plan is one of the most important steps you can take in disaster preparedness. Knowing what to do and how to do it can help your family manage disasters with less worry, fear and uncertainty.

- Decide what you and your family would do in each potential emergency situation.
- Draw a floor plan of your home showing escape routes.
- Choose a place away from your neighborhood where family members can meet in case you are separated and cannot return home due to a disaster.
- Identify a friend or relative who lives out of the area for family members to contact if you are separated.
- Post emergency numbers by every phone and teach children how and when to dial 911.
- Know how to shut off the water, gas and electricity at the main switches in your home.  
Plan how to help elderly or disabled neighbors in a disaster.
- Check that your insurance policies are up-to-date and provide good coverage.

## **Preparing a Disaster Supply Kit**

Having a disaster supply kit ready to take with you at a moment's notice ensures that you will have necessary supplies no matter how fast you may need to evacuate. Pack supplies in duffel bags or backpacks and keep them in a designated place. Your kit will also come in handy if you must take shelter in your home. This list will help ensure that your disaster supply kit includes all the essentials.

### **Water**

- Pack at least one gallon per person per day for at least three days.
- Store water in tightly sealed, non-breakable plastic, fiberglass or enamel-lined metal containers.
- Change your water every six months.

### **Food**

- Pack enough food to last each family member at least three days.
- Include canned and boxed foods because they require little preparation and stay good for long periods of time. Remember to bring a manual can opener or to buy food in self-opening cans.

- Pack foods in sealed metal or plastic containers.
- Replace food every six months.
- Include foods for infants and family members with special diets.

### **Tools & Equipment**

- Battery-powered radio
- Flashlights
- Spare batteries
- Resealable plastic bags
- Washcloths and towels
- Paper cups and plates and plastic utensils
- Toothbrushes, toothpaste, shampoo, deodorant, and other toiletries
- Heavy-duty plastic garbage bags
- Change of clothing and an extra pair of shoes and socks for each person
- Blankets or a sleeping bag for each person

### **Personal Items**

- Personal identification
- Copies of birth and marriage certificates, inventory of household goods, bank account numbers and other important documents
- Maps
- Extra car and house keys
- Prescription medications

### **First Aid Kit Essentials**

- Adhesive bandages
- Antacid
- Antibiotic ointment
- Anti-diarrhea medication
- Antiseptic
- Aspirin and non-aspirin pain reliever
- Cleansing agents (isopropyl alcohol, hydrogen peroxide, soap, germicide)
- Cotton balls
- First aid manual
- Gauze pads and roll
- Latex gloves
- Laxative
- Moist towelettes
- Needle and safety pins
- Petroleum jelly
- Scissors
- Sunscreen
- Thermometer
- Tongue depressors
- Triangular bandages
- Tweezers

### **In Case of Evacuation**

In a disaster situation, it may be necessary to evacuate your home for several days or longer. Because disasters can strike with little or no warning, you should be prepared to leave at a moment's notice. Knowing beforehand the steps to take in case of evacuation can make a big difference.

- Contact the local emergency management office to learn evacuation routes for your area.
- Determine where you will go if your community is evacuated.
- Discuss with your family the possibility of evacuation.
- Find out your child's school evacuation policy.
- Check that your disaster supply kit is assembled and ready to go.
- Make sure your car is filled up – fuel may be in short supply during a disaster.

### **When Authorities Tell You to Evacuate**

- Bring your disaster supply kit.
- Wear sturdy shoes and clothing.
- Unplug home electronics
- Lock the doors and windows.
- Turn off the main switches and valves for gas, water, electricity, if instructed.
- Inform a friend or relative of your route.
- Follow recommended evacuation routes. Watch for washed-out bridges, flooded areas and downed power lines.

### **Pets**

- Should not be left behind during a disaster, but do not risk your own safety attempting to find them if you must evacuate quickly.
- Attach ID tags to your pet with your name and address.
- Remember that most emergency shelters do not allow pets (except service animals).
- Make a list of pet shelters and of hotels that permit animals in the area you would evacuate to.
- Put together an emergency supply kit for your pet. Include things like a first aid kit, food dishes, a litter box, a leash or pet carrier, medication, food, veterinary records and water.

### **If You Are Going to a Public Shelter**

- Be aware that alcoholic beverages, pets and weapons are not allowed in public shelters.
- Practice patience and cooperation. Sharing a space with many others can be a challenge.
- Stay in the shelter until authorities advise you it is safe to leave.

### **Managing a Disaster at Home**

Although you may not be asked to evacuate – and even if you are – disasters can isolate you from outside help and make it necessary for you to care for yourself for days at a

time. Your disaster supply kit will contain many of the tools and supplies you need. Here are other ways to use and manage the resources you have at your home.

### **Water**

- Water is crucial for health and survival. If a disaster is imminent, fill pitchers, jars, buckets, water bottles and your bathtub in case your community water supply is cut off.
- If your drinking water supply is running low, use water from ice cube trays, the water heater and toilet tanks (but not bowls). It is not safe to use the water from radiators, waterbeds or swimming pools.
- Each person should drink at least two quarts of water each day. Drink what you need each day, and look for more water for the next day.

### **Food**

- Ration food supplies for everyone except children and pregnant women. Most people can survive easily on half the normal amount.
- Avoid eating food from dented or swollen cans or food that looks or smells abnormal.
- Use pre-prepared formula for babies.

### **In Case the Power Goes Out**

- Practice energy conservation to help your power company avoid rolling blackouts.
- Always keep your car's fuel tank at least half full – gas stations use electricity to operate pumps.
- Know how to manually release your electric garage door.
- Protect your computer with a surge protector.
- If the power goes out, check your fuse box or circuit breaker, or contact neighbors to see if the outage is limited to your own home.
- Turn off computers, stereos, televisions and appliances you were using when the power went off. Leave one light turned on so you know when power is restored.
- Avoid opening the refrigerator and freezer doors. Food will remain fresh for up to four hours after the power goes off. If you know power outages may happen, freeze water in plastic bottles to keep food cool longer.
- If the outage is expected to last for several days or more, consider relocating to a shelter or a friend's home.

### **Using a Generator**

- If you plan to use a generator, operate it outside only – not in the basement or garage. Do not hook it up directly to your home's wiring. Instead, connect the equipment and appliances you want to power directly to the outlets on the generator.

### **What to Do After a Disaster**

Whether returning home or venturing outside for the first time, beware of new dangers that may have arisen because of the disaster. You may experience washed out roads, downed power poles, contaminated drinking water or other hazards. Report problems promptly to local officials so that corrective measures can be taken.

### **Inspect Your Home for Damage**

- Look for structural damage, loose or damaged electrical wires, and gas leaks before re-entering your home. If you doubt the safety of the structure, contact a professional before entering.
- Do not enter a fire-damaged house until authorities have inspected it.
- Check the refrigerator and discard spoiled food.
- Contact your insurance agent.

### **Help Children Cope**

A child can be traumatized by a disaster whether it is experienced first-hand, seen on television or learned about from adults. Monitor the nature and quantity of disaster-related programming your children are exposed to and contact your school to determine how teachers are dealing with the situation.

If your children have questions about the disaster, answer them truthfully, but don't allow the subject to dominate your conversations. Provide reassuring words and affection.

### **For More Information**

The following organizations and agencies can help you prepare even more thoroughly for emergencies and disasters that could strike your community.

- Federal Emergency Management Agency – [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov)
- U.S. Fire Administration – [www.usfa.dhs.gov](http://www.usfa.dhs.gov)
- Citizen Corps – [www.citizencorps.gov](http://www.citizencorps.gov)
- U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention – [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)
- U.S. Department of Energy – [www.energy.gov](http://www.energy.gov)
- U.S. Department of Homeland Security – [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov)
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency – [www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov)
- National Weather Service – [www.nws.noaa.gov](http://www.nws.noaa.gov)
- U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission – [www.nrc.gov](http://www.nrc.gov)
- American Red Cross – [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org)
- Institute for Business and Home Safety – [www.disastersafety.org](http://www.disastersafety.org)